


LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY



DECEMBER
1991

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Worship • Worship and Children • Christmas

For Growth in Faith and Mission

In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter,
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter,
Long ago.

Heaven cannot hold him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign;
In the bleak midwinter
A stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air;
But his mother only,
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him—
Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti
(1830-1894)

ON THE COVER: "The Shepherdess," watercolor by Connie Bieber, Davenport, Iowa.

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Every Christmas I read a magazine article reminding readers to "keep Christmas throughout the year."

Those of us who have the privilege of working on Lutheran Woman Today have special reminders to keep Christmas throughout the year. For example, we planned this December issue in April, sitting on a deck with guest planners, enjoying a spring

in writing this note in 95-degree just heat, with 95 percent humidity. Yet we are humming carols as we prepare the issue.

There's something freeing about immersing oneself in thoughts of Christmas in April and August. Without seasonal pressures, it is easy to remember Christmas by:

remembering Emmanuel—
and with us. This truth is reflected in both themes of this issue: worship at Christmas. "God is with us" when we worship, say Arden Mead, Marion Sivesind and Robert Bern, in their articles. "God is with us at Christmas, say Karen Melang and Morris Wee.

paying attention to children. Ever since Jesus' birth, children and Christmas have been linked. See the two articles on children and worship (pages 10-17).

celebrating families and friends. After typing "Christmas in the Tropics" (p. 34), editorial secretary Margie Tolen said, "What a great year! My family always makes tapes for Christmas."

"It makes me think about lefse lessons," I replied.

"What's lefse?" Margie asked, prompting us to promise we'd share samples of our culinary customs.

★ **keeping—and sharing—the peace.** "Christmas Bandannas" (p. 36) is a true story of peace and good will.

★ **sharing our spiritual gifts.** See especially the Mission: Action column (p. 45).

★ **reflecting on the year.** The 1991 index (p. 28) offers a summary of LWT's year. Preparing the index underscored for us the value of looking at Women of the ELCA's eight aims as themes for issues.

★ **sending greetings.** Taking a cue from "Fancying Those Form Letters" (p. 40), we at LWT send greetings for a happy Christmas season. We hope 1992 issues will be a blessing to you, especially as we begin, in January, the new Bible study, *God's Promise of Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew*. We give thanks for you, LWT readers, and remember you in our prayers. We ask for your prayers on LWT's behalf as we begin our fifth year of production. And we invite you to join us in celebrating Christmas throughout the year.

Sue Edison-Swift

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

FEATURES

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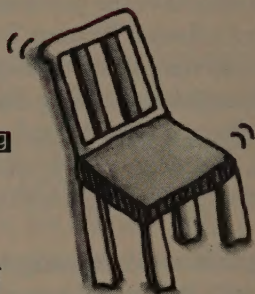
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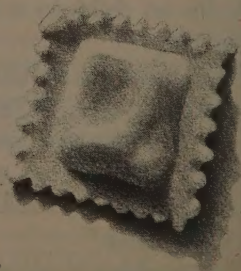
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A family tradition makes for a savory Christmas celebration. ©



CHRISTMAS BANDANNAS

Florence B. Smith

A true story of unusual friends. **G** **C**

A GIFT FROM MOTHER

Marjorie R. Paul

From death comes life. **G**

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Maren Lilja

What to do with *two* Marys? **G** **C**



FANCYING THOSE FORM LETTERS

Sandy Brass Jenkins

Form letters can be fun to send and receive. **C** **A**

E P A R T M E N T S

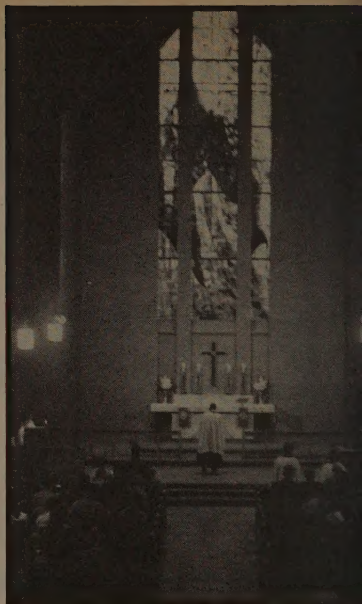
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the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to
men of the ELCA mission areas are marked with these symbols: **A** =
n, **C** = community and **G** = growth.

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You Can Count on It: A Rationale for Worship

Arden W. Mead



"I can worship God on the golf course," many of us might say. Or, "I can worship God in the woods, under the stars, or driving in my car, or on a ski slope." The punch line is always the same: "I don't have to go to church to worship God. I can do it anywhere."

Of course you can, and should. God is to be worshiped everywhere, in everything we do.

But does that happen? Really? Regularly? Consistently? Predictably? Consciously on schedule and on time? Can you count on it?

If someone asks you what you do when you go to the golf course (or the woods, or the beach, or a ski slope), is your first and most enthusiastic response, "Worship God!"?

But suppose someone asks, "What do you do when you go to church?"

Other places and activities may have different emphases, but when it comes to worship, church is where you can be sure it happens regularly, consistently, predictably, and consciously, on schedule and on time. You can count on it!

What happens in church is so predictable that most of the time you literally can

three scriptures and a psalm, one or four hymns, a handful of prayers and responses, half a dozen servers or so, a couple of announcements, three persons in the Trinity, "The Lord, one faith, one Baptism," candles for communion, and people all around responding, "And also for you." You can count on it.

You can count on this too:

God will show up—and with something to say, not just something general about creation and the wonder of the universe, but something specific about your need for forgiveness and strength and guidance and love and hope and encouragement. You can count on it.

And someone will be there who will help you begin understanding and applying what God has to say, someone trained and called to do just that, someone who also cares—about you and about you. That doesn't usually happen on the golf course. (It can, of course, but does it happen *regularly*—regularly, consistently, predictably, consciously, on schedule and on time?) But you can count on it at church.

And you can count on this too: not only will God be talking, but *people* will be talking too. We'll be doing it together, talking about things we care about—or should care about—things we might not have gotten around to talking about if someone hadn't brought them up.

But church is where things are brought up—a spouse's cancer, a child's broken collarbone, a neighbor's grief, a community's concern, a person's dilemma, a family's cause for prayer, an individual's achievement—not just talked about with another, but talked about *to God*. This is where that kind of thing happens—regularly, consistently, pre-

dictably, on schedule and on time. You can count on it.

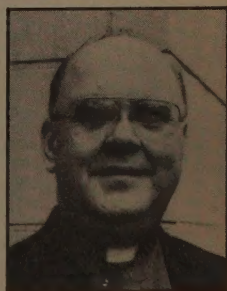
It may not always happen on the golf course (as the cliché says it can)—or in the woods or on the ski slope—but at church you can count on it: God will be called upon, consciously and actively. When the name of the Lord is uttered here, it is with reverence and joy, and not "in vain." Here the mention of *Jesus Christ*—"the name which is above every name" at which "every knee should bow" (Philippians 2:9-10) is not a cause for embarrassment, but the heart and center of all that goes on.

Jesus Christ should be the heart and center of every activity of life, no doubt—including the golf course, the woods and the ski slope—but can you count on it?

And that is what makes the worship of God's people so important and significant: **What happens in church is what we say we believe should be happening everywhere.**

It doesn't happen everywhere of course; that's sad but true. But it *does* happen at church—consistently, predictably, consciously, on schedule and on time. At church, what should be, *is*. You can count on it! ■

The Rev. Arden W. Mead is copastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Webster Groves, Missouri. He also writes and edits devotional and worship materials for Creative Communications for the Parish.



Worship That Works

Cindy G. Laue

Throughout
the ELCA,
worship is
a smorgas-
bord of
experiences.

What is happening with worship in congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? What are some of the trends? What seems to be working in vital congregations across the church? Can we preserve our Lutheran traditions, yet still be creative, as Martin Luther was? Can we worship with a little "pizazz" and still maintain genuine hospitality? How might we adapt the basic ingredients of traditional worship to make it more meaningful for newcomers and people with diverse life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and expectations?

Throughout the ELCA, worship is a smorgasbord of experiences that, at its best, fits the needs of the communities and settings and the people who belong to them. On behalf of Lutheran Woman Today, I contacted each of the nine ELCA regions, asking regional staff with worship expertise to name a congregation with "worship that works." Here is a brief description of the examples I received from across the church.

Experiencing Cultural Diversity

Christ the King, Snohomish, Washington

How can a congregation situated in a white rural setting experience the worship of another culture? Christ the King Lutheran Church of Snohomish, Washington, asked that question. The Rev. Kevin Forquer called Ted Huelsen, multicultural ministries director in Region 1, for help. Ted arranged for the African-American gospel choir "The Sound of the Northwest," to conduct a service. It was a whole new experience for us, and both the worship experience and the fellowship afterward were wonderful, exclaims Forquer.

Research, Experimentation, Pizazz

Community, Las Vegas, Nevada

"We try to bridge where the Lutherans are and where we want new worship going," says the Rev. Ray Christenson, pastor-developer of Community Lutheran Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. In 20 years the congregation has grown from zero to an average attendance of 1,131 and five worship services. "We keep the basic flow of the liturgy the same . . . we just put new content to it," Christenson says. Members say, "Worship is relevant . . . lively . . . meaningful . . . upbeat!"

On a continual quest for new ideas, Christenson interviews visitors, visits creative places of worship while on vacation and conducts a weekly survey of members. "We're not afraid to try something new and fail," he notes.

Kids' Voices in Worship

Westwood, Minneapolis, Minnesota

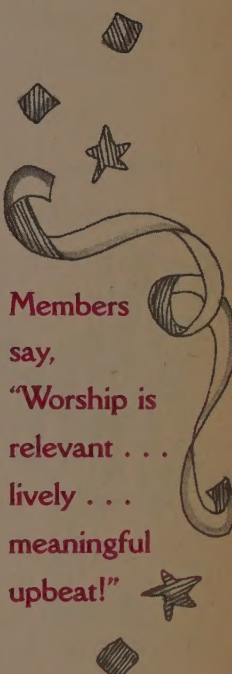
Yes! for Children, Yes! is a book by Ronald A. Nelson, director of music, Westwood Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The composer, author and music clinician believes in kids' voices. There are eight children's choirs at Westwood. "Music skills [and] worship studies . . . are part of the process of enabling those who elect to be servants in the area of worship leadership," a church brochure says. The music program ministers through the choir members and those who assemble for worship on Sunday mornings and at other times."

When you walk into Westwood Lutheran Church, there's an energy," says Shirley Teig, director of the Region 10 Center for Mission. "And it stays throughout the worship."

Pristine Liturgy, Music and Design

Christ the King, Houston, Texas

"If you're looking for duckbills and platypuses, you won't find them here," says the Rev. Edwin Peterman, pastor at Christ the King. "People find it refreshing to experience the liturgy in its plain unadorned form." Complementing the liturgy are the three bells that peal before and after worship, baroque music, Bach vespers and traditional architectural detailing of the nave (remodeled in 1983). Easy-to-read bulletins and visitor's flyers quickly involve the visitor and the regular worshiper. Peterman describes worship as "pristine" and "pure."



Members
say,
"Worship is
relevant . . .
lively . . .
meaningful
upbeat!"

Contemporary Tone

The Village, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

"The tone at Village allows the traditional rigidity and stodgy grumpiness of church to be overcome," says Werner, a college student and member of The Village Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The church is located in a refurbished former bar and disco in the inner city financial and artistic districts. "Each service seems to be made for today," comments member Bill Wood, a realtor. The Rev. James Bartos and the liturgy committee use different approaches, such as a circus liturgy, to integrate contemporary ideas in a spiritual setting.

Architectural Design— Light and Flexibility

Community of Christ, Whitehouse, Ohio

St. Philip's, Ypsilanti, Michigan

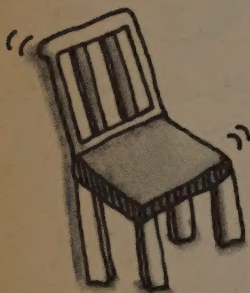
"What makes worship unique at Community of Christ is the worship room. . . .," writes the Rev. Mike Sherer, director of communications, Northwestern Ohio Synod. "The openness, warmth and light shining through the glass windows behind the altar permeate the worship space." The Rev. Ray Gottschling uses similar words to describe the warm, open people of Community.

Moveable furniture allows for freedom of expression at Community of Christ, as well as at Saint Philip's Church in Ypsilanti, Michigan. "Everything . . . in the sanctuary is moveable," says St. Philip's pastor John Roberts. Each night of Holy Week the chairs are arranged in a different setting according to the use of the liturgy. "Holy Week here is really a journey that moves many to deeper faith."

Breathing Change into Tradition

Emmanuel, Emanuelsville, Pennsylvania

At a rural crossroads north of Allentown, Pennsylvania sits Emmanuel Lutheran Church. Roots of the baptist congregation's inception. The Reverends Elizabeth and Barry Mitchell, copastors, illustrate change as they take turns leading the liturgy and preaching. "The area is so historical that to do just a few different things is a total awakening," Elizabeth Mitchell notes. "Members say 'Wow! I didn't know you could do these things in a Lutheran church.'" Changes in worship include improv-



Moveable
furniture
allows for
freedom of
expression.

nons for kids and the complete service printed on one
et to make it user-friendly for visitors.

Liturgy of the People

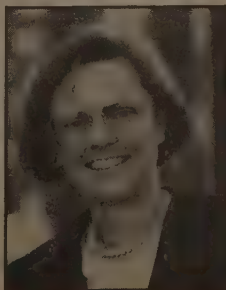
Capon-North River Parish, West Virginia
vely and unique Appalachian folk hymn liturgy devel-
d by Capon-North River Lutheran Parish members
resses their traditional values, strong connections to
land and Lutheran roots. (This three-point West Vir-
a parish is comprised of Ebenezer Church in Rio, St.
r in Wardensville, and Hebron in Yellow Spring.) The
gy adapts three sacred folk hymns. "In addition to
ing our worship more indigenous to the culture, we
e found local artists who are designing paraments and
es using Appalachian quilting patterns," says the Rev.
lip Huber. Tapping the handicrafts and art of the peo-
helps integrate their daily life and religious experience.

do lo Tengo

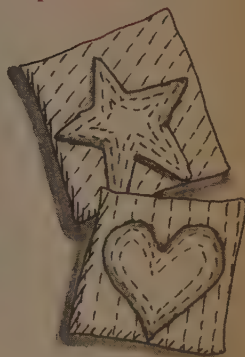
Bayamon, Puerto Rico
do lo Tengo, or "All I have I bring to the Lord," is the
of a song which captures the spirit of Sion Lutheran
rch's worship. The church, located in a heavily popul-
area of Bayamon, Puerto Rico, keeps its windows
doors open at all times. "People passing by stand out-
and participate," says the Rev. Gregory Villalon.
's triangular-shaped building with the altar at the
er is a pivotal point for the three surrounding com-
unities of people—the simple humble people, the middle
s, and the affluent. Colorful banners, Puerto Rican
ic, lay participation and liturgy written by members
trate *todo lo tengo*.

What about the congregations in your area? Which
ould you affirm for their worship practices and why?
haps your congregation could benefit from a discussion
worship that works." ■

*G. Laue is director for com-
ications, Region 1 of the ELCA,
d in Seattle, Washington. She
member of Trinity Lutheran
rch, Lynnwood, Washington.*

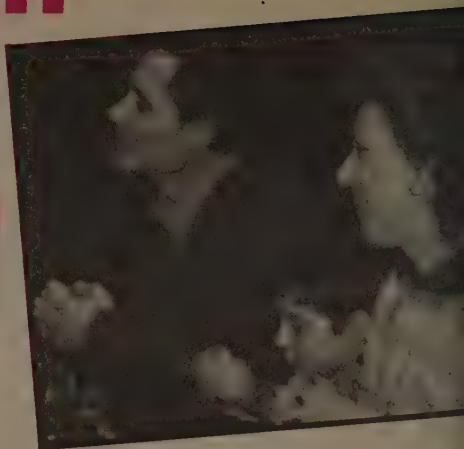


Local artists
design
paraments
and stoles
using
Appalachian
quilting
patterns.



Children in Church

Debbie Trafton O'Neal



What do you recommend I do for children's sermons?" a pastor beginning an interim ministry recently asked me. I answered him with a question, "Is a children's sermon the only way children are a part of worship?"

Although a few churches break the pattern, most of our churches today seldom do more for children during worship than provide them with children's bulletins and invite them forward to listen to a children's sermon. But there is more that can be done to make worship a meaningful part of the lives of children in congregations.

Parents today, especially parents of young children, are looking for churches that welcome children. Good Sunday school, Bible school and youth programs are part of what they are seeking, but so is making children feel at home during a worship service.

A parent worshiping with children faces challenges from juggling crayons and Cheerios for young children, prodding a sometimes sleepy teenager into the pew. Here are a few things to consider in determining your church's "hospitality quotient" for children:

- If you have a nursery or cry room, is it easily accessible, especially for visitors? Are there signs to direct parents?
- Is your nursery up to parents' standards of safety and cleanliness? Lyle Schaller, well-known expert on church growth, cites adequate nurseries and staff as key in making families feel welcome. Remember, the nursery may be the first place in your church that children and their parents visit.
- Does the pastor or worship leader welcome families and make it comfortable for those with fussy children to leave the sanctuary for a time?

Are children asked to be readers, acolytes and liturgists?

Are people in the pews encouraged to greet everyone during the sharing of the peace, including the children? Once, when one of my daughters was two years old, I turned and sat down after the sharing of the peace to find her crying. No one had shaken her hand or said good morning!

And what *about* children's sermons? Children's sermons get a lot of press, and there is much written to help people preach children's sermons. On the positive side, they do provide a time especially for children in the service, and they do give a much-needed break from sitting for wiggly children.

But more often than not, children's sermons are not geared to the level of the children for whom they are intended. Although young children do not think abstractly, most children's sermons are abstract object lessons. It would be much better to retell a Bible story, explain a special church holiday or symbol in simple language, or even sing a song with the children. And why not make it a point always to include a children's example within the actual sermon? Children "overhear" the gospel even when it seems they are not listening!

If a children's sermon is part of the tradition of your congregation, the pastor or worship leader can make it more meaningful for children by:

- Sitting down at the children's level to talk with them.

- Telling them facts or information, rather than having them guess first. Children usually remember the first thing they hear, even if told the correct answer later.

- Focusing on only one point or topic at a time. Keep it short and simple!

- Using props. Most children are highly visual, so items that show will help them remember what you talk about.

- Using examples from a child's perspective.

- Involving and including children and families in worship as a blessing, a privilege and a challenge. And in today's world, where families are so fragmented throughout the week—the worship service should be one place where families can be together. ■

Bobbie Trafton O'Neal is a free-lance writer and author of My Read-and-Do Bible Storybook (Augsburg, 1989) and An Easter People (Augsburg, 1986). She lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband and three daughters.



Worship Notes By Children

Kathleen Lull Seaton

What do children think about worship? To find out, I invited a number of children to share their ideas, experiences, and feelings about worship.

Finding willing volunteers came easily. But actually getting the children to talk about worship turned out to be somewhat more difficult. From the start I was reminded that children do not always respond to questions in the way adults might expect. I began by asking boys and girls to tell me about "going to church." Children of all ages responded with information about Sunday school, Bible school, youth groups, or other activities. These comments were overwhelmingly positive.

But I was puzzled why no one mentioned worship. Finally, I asked seven-year-old Christie. She explained: "Oh, yeah, I go to church, but I love Sunday school. That's the good part of church. Worship is church for grown-ups and Sunday school is church for children." I wondered how often congregations give this message to children.

So I asked new questions, this time focused specifically on worship. And they prompted several types of responses, depending on the children's ages.

Preschoolers enjoyed talking about the sensory aspects of worship. Four-year-old Timothy reported, "I

like to look at the candles and the windows and the people." His three-year-old friend, Laura, added, "I like the music best. The organ is so loud!" Five-year-old Jennie mentioned "holding that heavy book with music and the heavy gold plates. I can do it myself." Both four-year-old Deborah and five-year-old Paul responded "It's hard to sit still."

Another important part of worship for young children centered around people. Several children said "I like my pastor." They named other people as an important part of worship, saying "My teacher waves to me," "I see my grandma at church," or "I like to sit on the steps with all the kids (for the children's sermon)."

Elementary-school children often talked about worship in terms of their ability to take part in the service. Caitlin, eight, volunteered, "I like to go to worship when I know the songs. I sing along and I feel like I'm part of everybody." Ten-year-old Ben said, "I can read the words in the hymnal. I bring my own Bible, and my mom helps me find the right page." Sarah, 11, glowed as she said, "I love being an acolyte. I like to have an important job to do in worship."

When asked why they go to worship, some children expressed evidence of their growing religious understanding. Eight-year-old Kar

ied, "I go to church to think about
 ns. I feel close to Jesus when we
 and pray there." Ten-year-old
 n remarked, "I go because I be-
 e in God. Sometimes if I don't go,
 I feel guilty. I wonder if God is upset
 a me." Other children added, "I
 learning about Jesus," "I want
 to know that I love him," and
 ng to church is just part of what
 eans to belong to God's family."

Themes of understanding, or not
 understanding, were central in the
 ments of teenagers. Todd, 16,
 "I ask myself, 'What did the pas-
 just say?' I'm not usually sure, but
 y to think about it." Neilynn, 17,
 ed, "When I understand the ser-
 mon, I can apply it to my life. When
 on't understand it, I just day-
 m."

ixteen-year-old Rhett remarked,
 there to get the best message I
 get out of the sermon. I want to
 n something that I can follow
 ng the week. I really enjoy wor-
 ship—the liturgy, the sermon, the
 vers—now that I'm older."

When asked how they feel about
 worship, most young children replied
 with the simple phrase, "I like it."
 Older children and teenagers voiced
 a wider variety of responses. Rebek-
 kah, 13, said, "I kind of feel left out.
 Like everyone else knows what is be-
 ing talked about. Most of the time,
 I'm bored."

**"Sunday
 School is the
 good part
 of church."
 Christie, 7**

Eleven-year-old Daniel observed,
 "Sometimes worship seems set up."
 When the prayers and the liturgy are
 printed, it seems like the church is
 telling you what to say. There should
 be a time when people are allowed to
 say what they think or feel or even
 disagree." His sixteen-year-old sister,





Erin, added, "I feel so tired in church. It's hard to stay awake. At our church, even when everyone sings, it's still quiet. Sometimes I wish I went to a gospel church just for the energy and enthusiasm the people seem to have."

The children's moods changed when asked to tell about a favorite worship service. Their voices became more excited and their responses were lengthier. Almost without exception, the children spoke about Christmas.

Eight-year-old Stephen told this story: "Last year, my family went to church at 11:00 on Christmas Eve. It was so late at night that you couldn't even see the stained-glass windows. It was so beautiful. There were candles everywhere. I knew the songs. I didn't feel like I was in church. It was more real. It was like being at the stable with Mary and Joseph."

Tonya, 16, described her Christmas worship experience. "Suddenly, it's Christmas!" she said, "I know the songs. I understand the lessons. Even the sermon makes sense.

Everyone is there and everyone happy. People seem more interested in the service." Ten-year-old Anna thought for awhile before responding. "Well," she said, "Worship Christmas is the best. That's because you can feel God's love in the church. You aren't in a hurry to go home. You just want to sit there and make it last."

In this season of wonder, why not spend a few minutes talking about worship with some of the children in your congregation? The words and notes you hear may help you discover what helps, and what hinders, your people's participation in the worship life of your church. ■

An early-childhood specialist, Kathleen Lull Seaton is director of Good Samaritan Episcopal Day School in Paoli, Pennsylvania.

She is married and the mother of four children.



Of Puppets and Worship

Family Lenten Services

Mary Ingram and Linda Schomaker



Linda Schomaker and Mary Ingram with their puppets, McGruff and Peli.

"Where do you live?" asked the toddler as he gingerly patted the head of the big dog puppet on Linda's arm. "I live with her," Linda's puppet responded as he tossed his furry head in any way.

"Oh.... Do you live in a cage?" was the wide-eyed reaction.

"Oh, no! I usually sleep on the sofa—especially when she's at work!" whispered the puppet.

The child continued his conversation with McGruff, the puppet, while Mary had a similar talk with other children and her puppet, Peli.

This scene played itself out every week as part of the family Lenten services that we presented at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois. This was the third year that we had worked with

the church's lay associate Jim Valentine to develop a Lenten series specifically designed for families with children.

Interestingly, this year we noticed a number of older persons and others without children coming to the service. The puppets and their clear, simple stories about Jesus seemed to hold great appeal. The themes worked for all ages, on different levels, because they were based on universal biblical truths.

One of the goals in presenting the family Lenten services was to help children in the congregation learn about worship, and learn to feel comfortable in worship settings. So we decided to use a similar order of worship each year for these services. This allowed us to build on learnings

from one year to another. For example, the first year's theme, prayer, had offered a basis for the prayer segments of subsequent services. This year we asked the children some key questions and recorded their responses on an overhead projector. The pastor then developed these petitions into a prayer on the spot. It gave the children a chance to take part in the service right away.

While we did our services as a Lenten series, the idea could easily be adapted for use at other times of the church year. But be sure to leave enough time for planning and preparation—at least six weeks.

We worked hard to relate all parts of the service to the whole. This year's theme was "Who Is This Jesus?" We chose six Bible stories focusing on Jesus' care, acceptance, trustworthiness and presence.

Walk with us through a service. Our "Jesus is Someone Who Accepts Everyone" service went like this . . .

Abby, a fifth-grader, was playing

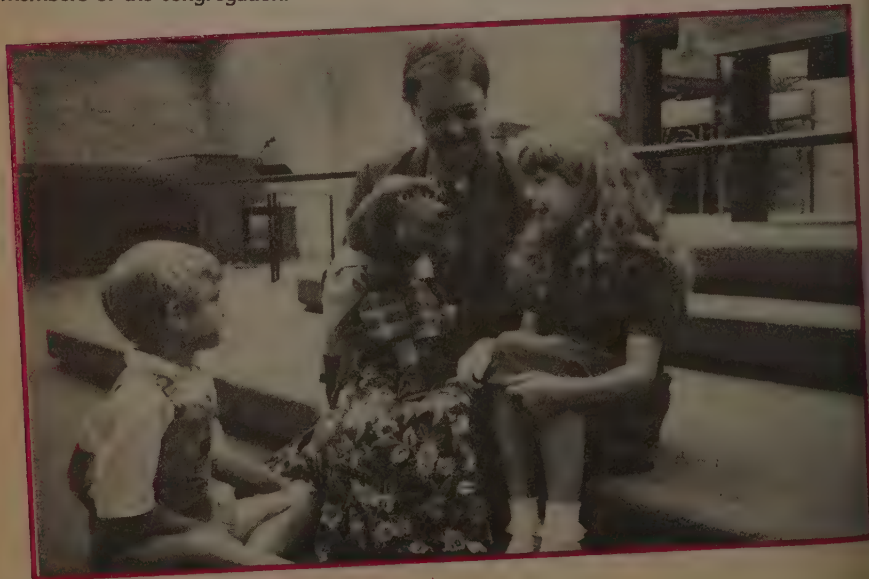
two violin solos for the prelude. Some of the children sat with Peli, the puppet, in the front pew. One preschooler came over to pet Peli and stayed there throughout the entire prelude. She went back to sit near her mother when Jim started the service with an invocation.

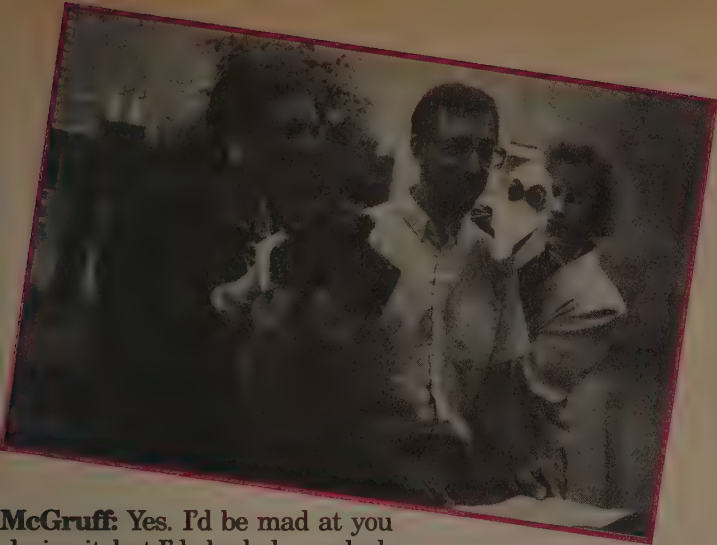
The congregation stood as we all sang "Jesus Is Good" (to the tune of "God Is So Good"). The words were projected on a screen at the front of the sanctuary. This week's new verse, "Jesus loves all," was added to fit the theme for the evening. Then it was time for puppets Peli and McGruff to "preach." Jim read the story of Zacchaeus while Peli and McGruff looked over his shoulder.

Peli and McGruff had some good conversations about the stories over the weeks. This week they realized that people were angry with Zacchaeus and didn't like him. "Does being angry ever get in the way of liking someone?" Peli and McGruff wondered. Let's hear them out.

Peli: Would you still like me if I borrowed your bone to play with and then lost it?

McGruff has a conversation with two members of the congregation.





McGruff and Peli, with Linda and Mary, look over Jim Valentine's shoulder as he reads a story.

McGruff: Yes. I'd be mad at you for losing it, but I'd also help you look for it. Do you like me even though I can't fly like you?

Peli: Yes, because I know you like me even though I can't run as fast as you can. Would you still like me even if I told one of your secrets to someone else?

McGruff: Yes, but it might be a while before I wanted to tell you another secret, but I would. . . .

Peli and McGruff concluded that Jesus likes all of us, including Zacchaeus, and that Jesus helps us to love others.

After the lesson the junior high choir sang "Jesus, My Lord and God."

Linda and Pastor Lois Pallmeyer then asked for prayer petitions from the children. Suggestions helped time the pump: "Name someone who loves you even when you are mad" and "Name someone you have had a hard time liking."

The children's responses were both honest and caring. They knew that liking *everyone* was difficult. They also knew that Jesus was going to help them through this difficulty. Linda's marker flew over the newsprint page as their comments came thickly. We stopped once the page was full, though the responses could

easily have filled two pages. Pastor Pallmeyer then invited everyone to pray with her as she pulled all their requests into one BIG prayer.

Jim shared some announcements and encouraged all the children to pick up a paper on tonight's theme after the service. These take-home papers contained activities for the week based on the evening's theme.

Mary taught a closing song, "Jesus, Jesus, Fill Us with Your Love." Soon we were singing together about loving and serving all our neighbors. Mary closed with "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." To which came the almost raucous reply, "Thanks be to God."

Throughout these family services, children came together with their faith community to sing praises, to hear God's word, and to pray about whatever was happening in their lives. And, most important, they had opportunity to experience God. ■

Linda Schomaker and Mary Ingram, members of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois, are also on the staff of the Division for Congregational Life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

WORSHIP:

The Body Language of a Congregation

Robert W. Bertram



ur new pastor, Janet Peele, had just concluded the Sunday service. Pleased as punch with herself, she stepped down into our midst and explained, "I told myself, give it a try. You can't do any worse than Roseanne Barr." First the congregation laughed, then broke into applause.

That was the week that Roseanne Barr, remember, had opened a major league ballgame with a controversial rendition of the national anthem. Meanwhile, back in St. Louis, Luther Memorial Church was trying to adjust to a new pastor who, unlike her predecessors at the church, did not chant. Not that we complained about it, or made comparisons. She had told us from the outset that she did not have the vocal range for chanting.

What we did not know was that behind the scenes for some time she had been conspiring with the organist and another musician in the congregation. They transposed the cantor's music downward a key or two and most important, provided moral support. Then came the big Sunday. Our pastor was actually chanting!



Janet, we all agree "peeled" like a bell—in timbre, yes, but mostly in sheer spunk. Our applause was a spontaneous doxology—in body language.

This episode serves as a parable. First, there was the element of fear, a key ingredient in any honest worship. In worship we worship our God

whom to know is to fear. Now it is not hard to imagine that Pastor Peele, faced with her first chanting, was afraid. But afraid of God, you ask? Wasn't what she must have been feeling just stage fright? Not just. True, she was frightened of us. But I'll bet that feeling made her frightened before God. How strange—the fact that she, a very darling of God, should allow herself to be scared by the likes of us. What a way to treat God! And that is scary being so distrustful of a God who is so trustworthy.

Maybe that is why our applause came so naturally. We could identify with Janet's fear. That morning the congregation I counted at least half a dozen people struggling with various kinds of cancer—and the

ere others with
eads of their
wn. But these
k are not ordi-
ary fearers, they
e also God-
arers. They
n't just fear
ing or rejection
ailure. They
so worry about
eir worrying, in
e face of a God
ey know is gra-
ous.

Their fear of God is part of their
orship. That is why all of us at Lu-
er Memorial begin each service by
cing not forward—toward the al-
r, the Holy of Holies—but toward
e rear of the church. Then we turn
ly as the crucifer passes and, in a
nse “hiding behind the cross,” ad-
ress the very presence of God. This
body language for God-fearers.

The second point in this parable is
at Pastor Peele's venture was an
t of faith. And what else is worship
t that we go, as Paul says in Ro-
ans 1:17, “from faith to faith”?
hat was she trusting? That we the
risoners wouldn't let her down?
aybe. That her musicianship
ould triumph? I doubt it. Out on a
nb that morning, she must have
en counting on the everlasting
ms of God. That is why we ap-
auded, not just for Janet Peele but
r her Sponsor, who “bore her up”—
bodily you could hear it in her
anting and in our singing.

So faith, too, has its body lan-
age, just as fear does. For instance,
that same Sunday service, when
ople came up to the rail for the
ody and blood, most of them
eeled. Some of them, before they
eeled, turned first to the crucified
rist above the altar, and bowed.



Faith does have
its own body (and
blood) language
—and it is often
different for each
of us.

We have so far
spoken of fear
and of faith. How
about another *f*,
namely, fun? In
that Sunday ser-
vice when Pastor
Peele was chant-
ing full speed,

you could tell that she—and we—
were beginning to have real fun. This
is not unusual for our congregation.
Take that moment in the service
when we exchange the peace. People
are out of their pews in a flash, work-
ing both sides of the aisle, pressing
the flesh—some of them, would you
believe, even with kisses.

Granted, worship is not frivolity.
But when you think about the fact
that in the exchange of the peace we
are actually pardoning sin, and re-
peating the absolution one to the oth-
er, what could be more celebrative?
If “fun” seems too frivolous a concept,
then think of fun as in forgiveness—
when we truly know we are freed
from our sin and guilt. It is a know-
ing that takes place in the heart, and
in and through the hands that reach
out to one another in the peace. Then
all the more, we celebrate the body
language of faith, and the church! ■

*The Rev. Dr. Robert W. Bertram is a
retired Semine professor of histori-
cal and systematical theology at Lu-
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Community in St. Louis, Missouri.
He is also co-chair of his congrega-
tion's worship and music committee
in Richmond Heights, Missouri.*

Peace in My Heart

Marion Sivesind

Twice I have sat in the pews of my church and heard my pastor read the words of *Lutheran Book of Worship's* burial service for members of my immediate family. I can close my eyes today and still hear Pastor Dean Moe reading them for the memorial service for our son Charlie in 1981. Then, in 1985, Pastor Les Gyllstrom read them at my husband Cap's funeral. How those words quieted and comforted me! Hear them now:

"O God of grace and glory, we remember before you today our brother. We thank you for giving him to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. In your boundless compassion, console us who mourn. Give us your aid, so we may see in death the gate to eternal life, that we may continue our course on earth in confidence until, by your call, we shall be reunited with those who have gone before us; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

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Since those two events, I have pondered this prayer to see if I can understand how the Holy Spirit used it to bring me comfort and peace.

First of all, there is the address: "O God of grace and glory." This is a revelation that I am not alone in this tragedy. My God is one of grace and glory; that means love and power are available to me.

Then comes the thanksgiving element: "We thank you for giving him to us. . . ." True, I have suffered tremendous losses, but I have enjoyed tremendous blessings to have

known and loved this delightful and challenging son for 44 years, and to have had as a companion for 40 years his loving and lovable husband.

Another petition follows: "In your boundless compassion, console us who mourn." Here I acknowledge God's mercy and ask for God's help. I find that "boundless compassion" is real. But to keep going, I must have hope. One way hope comes is to see death as a gate to eternal life—both for those who have gone before and for me so that I may eventually be reunited with them.

The petition, "Give us your aid . . . that we may continue our course on earth in confidence" hit me with enormous impact. It dawned on me that *my life didn't end with the death of these beloved persons. Life goes on.* There is still work to be done. There are family and friends to love, and to be loved by, people to be supported and to enjoy, grandchildren to be nurtured and to watch develop, memories to be treasured and passed on, encouragement to be given, and indeed, joy and laughter to be experienced.

On my down days I also rely heavily on "fear not" passages in Scripture. My favorite is Isaiah 41:10: "fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." Throughout my days, with God's help and the support of family and friends, I try to live with peace in my heart. ■

Marion Sivesind has been a wife, mother, homemaker and volunteer in church and community. She loves to travel and read.

This article is adapted from a Lenten meditation she prepared for her congregation, Bethesda Lutheran in Ames, Iowa. She comments, "I come from a nonliturgical church and I am nonmusical, so I have struggled with Lutheran liturgy. However, this is typical of faith and peace—they seldom come without a struggle."

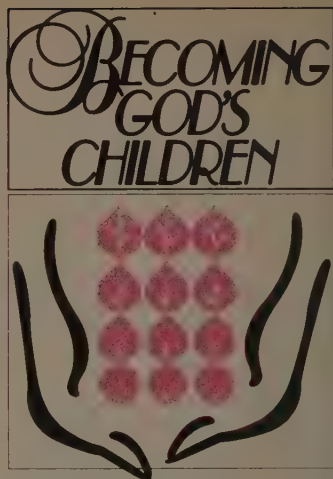


Session 12

Lives of Holiness and Godliness

Eva and Michael Rogness

Study text: 2 Peter 3:8-14



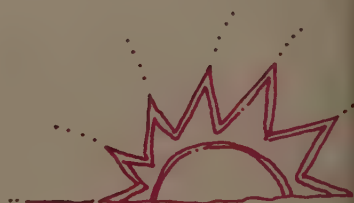
A well-known children's song sounds happy, but it expresses one of the deepest fears of human beings: "That's all, that's all, that's all there is, there ain't no more." The study text for this session answers this fear by saying, "Not only is there more, you haven't heard the half of it yet!" At our death and at the end of the world, eternity in all its richness and glory comes rushing into our limited, finite world.

Opening Devotion

*A thousand ages in your sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.*

*O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Still be our guard while troubles last
And our eternal home!*

From "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," *Lutheran Book of Worship* 320, text by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), alt.



Understanding the Word

In the study text for this session, Peter directs our vision to the end of the world. Everything on this earth is transitory and will die. When we acknowledge that fact, then we can begin to live meaningfully.

As the first century drew to its end, Christians realized that Christ was not returning in their lifetime. "Was his promise to return not true?" they began to wonder.

Peter's answer is that God's time is different from our time. Fifty years might seem a long time to us, to Christians; but it is a blink of an eye for God. In the way God sees time, there is scant difference between one day and 1000 years. In fact the delay can actually be seen as a sign of God's love and mercy, giving people more time to repent and be saved.

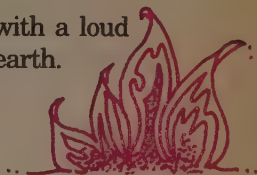
The Day of the Lord

The day "will come like a thief" (2 Peter 3:10). Although Jesus said that only God knows when that day is coming (Matthew 24:36), people in every century have tried to predict when the world would end. Of course they have all been unsuccessful.

These verses envision the end of the world coming with a loud noise and then with fire, burning up everything on this earth.

1

In what way does this possibility seem more likely in our century than in any previous time?



What Sort of Persons?

Verse 11 brings us to the heart of this section. If the world is indeed coming to an end, then we must ask ourselves, "What sort of persons should we be?" The answer is persons who live in holiness and godliness, waiting for the end of the world.

Holiness means to be set apart in service to God. *Godliness* means to have God-like qualities, such as grace, love, mercy and justice.

2

What other qualities do you think of in relation to these two words—holiness and godliness?

The word *new* is one of the most important words in the Bible, especially in its New Testament usage. Today we often use the word in a chronological sense, in relation to something that has not existed before, and which may not, in fact, be any better than the old. For example, we may tear down a lovely historic building and put in a "new" parking lot. Yet the "new" may not be an improvement.

In the Bible, however, the word *new* always means "renewed" or "made better."

3

What examples can you think of in the New Testament where the word or concept of new occurs?

Another characteristic of the word *new* in the New Testament is that it looks to the future but still has a profound impact on the present. For instance the “new age” that will end in heaven has already begun. Born anew in Baptism, we are already part of eternity!

The mark of the new heavens and new earth is righteousness. The New Testament uses one Greek word, *dikaiosune*, for both *righteousness* and *justice*. *Dikaiosune* is a remarkable word, used in three ways:

1 The righteousness of God. Only God is fully righteous.

2 The righteousness of God that is accounted to us because of Jesus. Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), Jesus took upon himself the consequence of our sins, so that for us “faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Romans 4:5; see also 3:22).

3 *Righteousness* is also the same word as *justice*, and the Bible is full of occasions where we are asked to work for justice in this world.

Like the word *new*, the word *righteousness* is not only a word for the future—it affects the present. This means that the righteousness of God is given us through Christ, but God also urges us to strive for righteousness on this earth. This means that we are justified by God in Christ, but justice is also one of the marks of God’s reign on earth. As justified children of God, we are empowered to work for justice on this earth. Our hope for the future shapes our lives today.

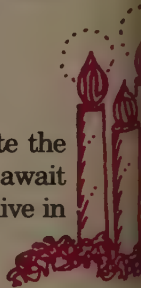
Interpreting the Word

Advent is a season of “coming,” when we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus to the Bethlehem manger, and when we also await his coming once again. Trusting in this future, how shall we live in the present?

The Christian View

Depending on one’s view of eternity, a person could view life in two extremes:

1) If one expected the end of the world very soon, what sense would



ere be to go to school, get married, or choose a lifetime career? Some Christians are so obsessed with the end of time that they never participate fully in life on this earth.

2) Now that centuries have passed and Jesus has not returned, the opposite reaction is more prevalent: people live in the present, if there is no eternity.

The Christian view is neither of these two extremes. We believe we are very much part of this earthly life because it is God's world.

We also know that this world is transitory. Many people live in denial, trying to wipe this fact from their consciousness. But illness and death continually jar us with that reality. In the Middle Ages, people greeted friends with the phrase, "*Memento mori*" ("Remember that we must die"). It acknowledged death as a fact of life, but expressed the faith that death had been conquered by Christ.

As Christians, we trust that our true destiny is in eternity with God. But this is more than a trust in the future. Knowing that we are part of God's eternity already gives us an entirely different perspective on life today. Frances Cabrini, who came to the United States in 1889 to work with immigrants and founded more than 50 hospitals, schools and orphanages, lived with that kind of view. She wrote: "I travel, work, suffer my weak health, meet with a thousand difficulties, but all these are nothing, for this world is so small. To me, space is an imperceptible object, as I am accustomed to dwell in eternity."



ew, All New

When a baby was born to Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in England, he looked and acted like other babies. But he was not an ordinary baby at all. From the moment of his birth, baby Charles was destined to be king of England someday. That fact affected every waking moment of his life from infancy on.

Christians appear to be human beings like any other, but from the moment we are baptized, the whole of eternity opens up before us, and the Spirit of God sweeps us into something new. It is no wonder that the word *new* is such a big word in the Bible.

nce You Wait

"...once you wait" (2 Peter 3:14) may be the three key words in this passage. Because of them we no longer read this passage as spectators, but we ourselves are drawn into the message. Why? Because we too are waiting.

While we are waiting, our lives should be "without spot or blemish" (verse 14). Our lives are without blemish only in Christ, for we stand

before God clothed in the righteousness that Christ has won for us. However, we also want to grow toward that goal as we live. While waiting, we are constantly “becoming” as children of God’s creation.

4

Since righteousness is such a comprehensive word in the Bible, why are congregations so often divided between those who are more concerned about evangelism (spreading the word of God’s righteousness for us in Christ) and those who are more concerned about social action (God’s righteousness in society)? How do you think congregations can adopt a more wholistic approach to evangelism and social action?

In Christ, we also wait “at peace” (2 Peter 3:14). The future is frightening for many people. Sometimes it is for us, too, for we are naturally concerned about our families, our jobs, pollution, world peace, and many other things. But all of these concerns are reshaped by what follows when this world is done. We are “at peace,” because we know that God is there waiting for us.

Ronald Bridges, former president of the Pacific School of Religion, noted that we speak of “nostalgia,” a longing for the past, and suggested that Christians coin the term “futalgia,” a longing for the future. With confidence that we are part of God’s eternity, do we not live with a sense of “futalgia”?

Living the Word

Do you ever peek ahead to the end of books you are reading? Do you like to know the ending of a tense movie before you go?

Like anyone else, Christians never know how life will unfold. But we do know how the story comes out in the end. In the last moment before Pope John XXIII died of cancer, he said, “My bags are packed, I’m ready to go.” Then, very softly, he added, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” And he went, confident in where he was going.

Confidence!

Sojourner Truth was a remarkable woman. Born in 1797, she escaped from slavery to become an abolitionist and traveling preacher. Before she died at the age of 86, someone spoke to her about death, and she replied, “I’m not going to die, honey; I’m going home like a

ooting star!" That's the confidence we Christians have, trusting that we are part of God's eternity.

There is hardly a more emotionally charged word than the word *home*. Christians know where their destination is in the end—not a frightening unknown place, but home!

Minnesota poet and artist Jean Formo recently wrote this poem as a gift for a friend who had lost her brother and father in the same week. The poem expresses how faith in God's eternity changes the way we look at death and life.

Death is God carrying us
in one arm while the other
flings aside heaven's door
to welcome us
back to the blazing hearth
of our first home,
while those inside,
having arrived before us,
rush to the door
like glad children shouting,
"They're here!"
Death has a bad name on earth
but in heaven
it's a homecoming party
everytime the door opens.
God does not forget
those earthbound children,
sad and left behind.
God leaves the party early
to enter into their despair
and to get them ready
for their own parties someday.

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Looking Ahead

January begins a new year and a new Bible study titled *God's Promise of Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew*.

This Bible study was edited by Ivis LaRiviere-Mestre. For questions or comments about the Bible study, write to Director for Educational Resources, Women of the CA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. For comments about articles and other features in LWT, write to "Letters to the Editor," LWT, at the same address.



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Personal Diplomacy and Friendship:
U.S.—U.S.S.R. Family Camp
Woman Who Loved God, A

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S. Harbaugh, May
C. L. Seraphine
T. Munson-Benson May
K. Awe June
W. May Jr. June
S. Groenewold Ju./Aug.

R. Boriack June
B. Raschke Oct.

D. T. O'Neal Jan.

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Does War Work?
Peace, Justice and the Work of God
Peacemaker, Betty Olson
Dancing Early to a Different
Drumbeat
Price of Justice, The
U.N. Convention: Eliminating
Discrimination Against Women
Vision of Peace with Justice, A
War and the Innocents

B. Brekke Oct.
L. Erdahl Oct.
S. Krass Oct.
B. Stevens Oct.
J. Martensen Oct.

T. Strieter June
M. Nickelson Feb.

J. Diers Oct.
J. Earp Oct.

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Bachelor Parties: A Modest Proposal
Cover Meditation
Cover Meditation
Communion (devotion)
Discovery: God's Caravan of Gifts
God's Surprises
I Can Do It
Joys of Mentoring, The
Life Is God-sized
Living Boldly . . . By Grace Alone
Real Men Don't Carry Carnations

M. O'Connell-Cahill June
K. Melang Jan.
M. Anderson Mar.
J. A. Hagy Ju./Aug.
L. Wu Mar.
D. T. O'Neal Mar.
G. Hodnefield Jan.
K. Smith May
C. Mickelson Jan.
R. Jensen Jan.
J. Trygstad June

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Sept.

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Everyday Theologians
Eight Top Heresies, The
Implications of the Gospel
Lord's Prayer, The
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Scandalous . . . Marvelous: Jesus and
the Woman at the Well
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Women Come to the Seminary

G. McGrew Eifrig
T. Krause
M. Marty
D. Swan
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M. Y. Nilsen
C. Lewis

D. Juel
J. Hoshek
C. Keller
R. Jensen

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Ju./Aug.
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Mar.
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Ju./Aug.

WOMEN & CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

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In Their Own Words: Women on
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Keeping WIC Lit
A Profile of Women and Children
Living in Poverty
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D. Strieter
S. M. Ericsson
J. Lynn

B. Howell
C. Dixon

D. Strieter
S. Birkelo

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WOMEN OF THE ELCA

Hope for Ministry
LWT Survey
Models for Mission and Ministry
Purpose Statement
Revitalization Begins with You
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What Difference . . . a Women's
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M. Olson
—
D. Yancey
—
J. Rapp
J. Sass
J. Springer

C. Chilstrom

Apr.
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WORSHIP

Children in Church
Of Puppets and Worship: Family
Lenten Services
Worship Notes by Children
Worship That Works
Worship: The Body Language of a
Congregation
You Can Count on It

D. T. O'Neal
M. Ingram,
L. Schomaker
K. Lull Seaton
C. Laue
R. Bertram

A. Mead

Dec.
Dec.

Dec.
Dec.
Dec.

Dec.

Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

Child-care network meets in Denver

cators, child advocates and con-
tational leaders are meeting for
ecumenical child-care network
ference in Denver, Colorado, in
ember. Sally Camp, Evangelical
neran Church in America direc-
for health, healing and health-
ministries, is speaking to par-
nants on "Nurturing Healthy
chers, Children and Families."
*God of Love, grant wisdom and
ngth to all who nurture children.*

South Africans continue to face violence

ence continues to menace the
y lives of South Africans. Dean
rence Khuzwayo of the Evan-
cal Lutheran Church in
hern Africa was shot in his
l, stomach, hands and legs when
allegedly refused to join in an
ed attack on the African Nation-
ongress. His deputy in the cir-
the Reverend David Mfeka, was
d earlier this year. "It is a big
enge for the church to work for
nciliation," said Bishop S.T. Zulu
e South Eastern Diocese.
*God, keep us from complacency.
r our prayers for peace and jus-
in South Africa.*

♦ ELCA channels disaster funds

The ELCA Hunger Appeal, through
its International Disaster Response,
is at work in several areas of the
world. ELCA funds give aid to vic-
tims of conflict in places like Ethio-
pia, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Moz-
ambique and Angola.

*Thank you, Lord, for channels that
allow us to reach out to those in need.*

♦ AIDS vaccine may not help Africa

Although a vaccine against the HIV
virus that causes AIDS could be
ready within the next five years, it
might not work in Africa, where the
epidemic is at its worst. Strains of
the virus rampant there are different
from those in the West. The World
Health Organization also estimates
that about six million adults are in-
fected with HIV in sub-Saharan Afri-
ca alone. Of the 40 million people
likely to be infected with the AIDS
virus by the year 2000, nine out of 10
will be in Africa and Asia.

*Eternal God, help us to learn more
about AIDS and to minister to those
affected by it.*

Remember to add to your daily pray-
er list people and issues in the local,
national and international news. ■

*Sonia C. Groenewold is news editor
of The Lutheran.*

My cousin moves efficiently around his state-of-the-art kitchen gathering a canister of flour, a dozen eggs and a large pink-and-gold tin of olive oil. For many years now, on a day between Christmas and the New Year, my aunt, my sister, my sister-in-law, my cousin and I come together to make ravioli.

Christmas Ravioli

Carol Driscoll

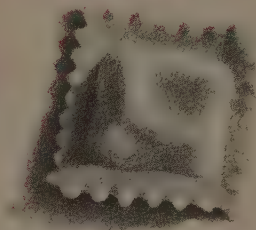
We five are the hard-core laborers on this yearly project. Other members of the family contribute sporadically. Occasionally, the children take turns in separating the plows of dough with a wheeled cutter until bored.

drives them off again to their still-new toys. A lot of the work is done beforehand by my busy, organized cousin. By the time the rest of us arrive, the thick red sauce has cooked weeks before is defrosting in a microwave oven, and my Aunt Esther's recipe for spinach-sausage filling is already prepared and sitting in a huge crock pot bowl on the table. We take turns mixing, rolling, and filling the pasta dough. By carrying out these slow, acting steps in the operation, we pay our respects to our foremothers who, in my imagination at least, carried out the entire exhausting process in dark Genovese kitchens.

Breaks are appearing here and there on the surface of the dough; I'm rolling the dough too thin. If the dough is too thin, the ravioli will fall apart when they are boiled; if the dough is too thick it will harden and clump; if you overstuff the ravioli with filling, they will pop open. Every year I must relearn the tedious art of pasta-making.

My sister-in-law, who is of German-Austrian descent, rolls with a deft hand. She tells us that strudel is made in the same painstaking way. My sister sprinkles flour on the rolling pin; now it is her turn to flatten and smooth the next unwieldy lumps of dough.

Despite the threat of "ravioli elbow," this tradition is an important holiday event to all of us. Like so many



her families, ours is scattered. Some members are in other states, and even those of us who live in the same city can't find the time to see each other as much as we would like.

The ravioli-making seems to connect us to others in the family far beyond my cousin's kitchen. "Your mother, my mother, they are with us now," my aunt said one year when she spoke of my grandmother, Carmen, and my mother, Matilda, both long-dead. While I do not see in this communal cooking a "calling up of spirits," it does carry with it an unspoken sense of tribe, continuity and nurture. Along with the home-made ravioli, we are serving up something that none of us gets enough of in a culture too tolerant of alienation: belonging and a sense of place. Alzheimer's disease has now robbed my Aunt Matilda of even the memory of those who love her and surround her at this table, but her kindness and gentleness, which are her essence, still remain.

These Christmases bring changes to us all, but I want to believe that like the weighty, handed-down mixing bowls we use today, some things are indestructible: Carmen's humility, dignity and patience; Matilda's compassion, faith and generosity. In the women laughing and joking beside me, in the children who—like all children—are full of promise and possibility, I see the glimmer of the character of our foremothers, who died far too young. This holy season brings hope that I, too, have inherited more than the strong back and flexible wrists needed for pasta-rolling.

By the time the floury surfaces are wiped, the dishwasher loaded and the steaming ravioli set on platters, night has fallen on the short winter day. My cousin lights the candles on the dining room table and turns on the Christmas tree lights. Her husband pours red wine into glasses. A few of the people who did not have the day off from their jobs are just arriving.

As we share the meal, it has become our habit to comment, savor and then compare—somewhat unfavorably—each year's batch of ravioli to Carmen's, which we remember fondly as the ideal. Secretly, I think we are doomed to fall a little short of the mark each year. Such lack of perfection is all the more reason to get together next year and try again. ■

Carol Driscoll, a free-lance author from St. Louis, Missouri, loves pasta, gardening, cats and reading.

Christmas Bandannas

Florence B. Smith

What would you think if you saw a deer prance up driveway onto the porch of a brick home and place its nose against a windowpane brightly decorated for Christmas? What if the front door opened and a German shepherd dog rushed out, springing at the defenseless doe?

I witnessed this incident as I drove home from my mother's. I pulled the car onto the shoulder of the road and stopped. Desperately I wondered what I should do to distract the dog and save the deer. I jumped out of the car but soon realized that the dog and the doe were romping together like litter siblings!

Spellbound, I watched this pair and wondered how the relationship came to be. I returned to my car and drove away—assured that the doe was safe.

A few weeks later, returning to my mother's home for Christmas, I crossed the creek where I had seen the unlikely pair. Again I had

stop my car and gape. This time a trio approached me—a middle-aged woman, a German shepherd and a doe. All three wore red bandannas tied in bows around their necks. The deer and dog walked side by side.

I was immediately curious. I hadn't stopped wondering about this dog/deer relationship since that first day. "Happy holiday," I said, standing very still while the dog and the deer watched me with great brown eyes.

"Fine day for a walk," the woman answered.



complimented the group on how festive they looked in their red handkerchiefs, and asked the woman about the unusual friendship between her pets.

Suddenly we weren't strangers. We introduced ourselves, and she invited me into her warm, fragrant living room. She served hot tea and ginger cake as we talked about the animals.

One day," she began, "this baby doe wandered onto my property, weak from hunger, so frightened so badly she could hardly walk. My dog immediately nuzzled the young deer. The doe remained the nuzzling without fear, and my shepherd seemed to sense the doe's need for food. As if on cue, the dog led the deer to his freshly filled dish, and they shared the first of many meals. From that day on, the doe hasn't missed a day of eating with us. Needless to say, time has bonded this unique friendship."

Later as I bid them good-

I took one last look at the shepherd and the doe

feeding together and eating from a common bowl.

As I went on my way, I thought how the animals' unusual friendship reminded me of a Bible passage. "The wolf shall lie with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together . . ." (Isaiah 11:6-7, New Revised Standard Edition).

The dog and the doe could almost make one believe the millennium is on the way. The closest my household has come to this wonderful time described in Scripture is my brown dog and a black cat who have not killed each other yet. This year, for Christmas, I think I'll buy them red bandannas to tie around their necks. Maybe having something in common will help them to behave like the wolf and lamb—or at least like a wonderful shepherd and a half-wild, whitetail deer I've come to know. ■



Patience B. Smith, Overland Park, Kansas, is a free-lance writer, a columnist and novelist.



A Gift from Mother

Marjorie R. Paul

Mother's funeral took place on Christmas Eve. Draped over her casket was a spray of peach roses, the last gift I would give her. After the committal I reluctantly accepted a rose plucked from the spray by other family members. I didn't want it; in my mind they were mother's roses. Little did I know that from this last gift to her I would receive a gift.

The trip back from Toledo, Ohio, to Warren, Michigan, was dismal. This would be an unusual Christmas, the anguish of loss mingling with the joy of the season.

Once home, I placed the rose in a bud vase, hoping it could be revived. Then I put it in the living room among the Christmas decorations. There it sat until the new year and time came to take down the decorations and get on with life's routines. The rose was now brown, but somehow I couldn't convince myself to throw it out. So I placed the vase with the rose in it on my kitchen window behind the curtain. I moved it periodically to dust but couldn't part with it.

As the weather warmed, awaking resting life outdoors, the time came to open windows. I had to make a decision about the rose. . . . I would place it in mother's cedar chest, now at my house. But when I looked I saw my rose had grown roots and a fragile green sprout! The joy of that discovery still gives me shivers and fills my eyes with tears. From that sprout my mother's rose grew into a lovely little rose bush, bearing one perfect peach rose that we placed on the altar of our church for worship one Sunday.

Even if my little rose bush never blooms again, it has been a reminder to me that from death comes life. It has been a symbol of that Christmas rose, Lord Jesus, whom we worshiped even through tears last Christmas Eve . . . the one who died that we may live and have life and beauty abundantly. ■

Marjorie R. Paul is employed at Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan. She has been a pastor's wife for 31 years and is the mother of five children.

It was casting day for the annual Christmas pageant. Because there were many children in our parish, we traditionally offered the lead parts to one class, the third graders. After years of being angels and shepherds, their moment had come.

The arrival of children and parents was a chaotic, friendly scene when the volunteer directors simultaneously greeted each child and welcomed each parent, gently herding them toward designated places in the church.

This year, two loud mother-voices rose over the greeting ritual. Which daughter would be Mary? They all but glowered at one another. By the time the director got to them, tears were streaming down the faces of the two prospective Marys. Without a word to the mothers, the director took the girls aside to console them and ask their advice. With uncluttered nine-year-old wisdom they knew that Mary—being Mary—was a role big enough for two!

Everything worked in the pageant that year. Joseph actually concerned about the long journey, worried that there was no place for them at the inn, and even thought of sweeping the floor of the stable after he had helped Mary dismount the little donkey on rollers. The angel of the Lord was in place on her ladder in time to glow in the spotlight for the proclamation. The shepherds carefully tended their “sheep”—a white standard poodle and three beloved stuffed lambs.

Christmas Pageant

Maren Lilja

They acted asleep in their fields, startled and afraid when the angel brought them “tidings of great joy,” and humble in the stable. The innkeeper was properly harried. The “multitude of heavenly host” shone with their natural preschool radiance.

But what made this pageant so memorable were *two* young Marys. Becky, with naive confidence, made the long journey to Bethlehem through the aisles of the church, and then discreetly faded into the shadows so that a serene and radiant Jenny could bring forth the Savior son, wrap him in swaddling cloth, and lay him in the manger bed she had prepared. From their first reconciling decision on casting day they brought patience, joy, compassion, reconciliation and strength—just like the other Mary. ■

Maren Lilja, Edina, Minnesota, is a graphic designer and illustrator with Lilja Baehr Design, designers of LWT.

Fancying

Those Form Letters

Sandy Brass Jenkins



Christmas form letters? "No thanks!" I said for years. Gradually, however, they have become part of my holiday scene, along with miniature lights and candy canes.

Most of us try to keep in touch with family and close friends. It's also fun to hear from acquaintances, find out what's going on, and perhaps be remembered in a way that we didn't expect. And who can deny the great pleasure of discovering something other than business letters, bills and junk mail in the post? As the years go by, I'm becoming convinced that correspondence is one of the best gifts to give or receive.

"The problem is," sighs my friend Maude, "we really don't have anything interesting to say." But I didn't see it that way at all. Living across town from her, I can still envision her telephone call last spring in which she described how she (quite pregnant) and her husband (recovering from back surgery) installed their own underground sprinkling system. "We used lots of rope. I dragged and he pushed, and we got the job done," she laughed.

Ordinary doings can take on a new light when we confide what really happened, or how we felt about it. After all, aren't we writing because there is a special connection between us? We want to know: about the word-processing class you're taking; how the job is treating you; what you're doing to keep those allergies down; if five-year-old Ian is reading the classics yet; and whether you've added a new bell to your collection. Some folks, perhaps at a loss for words themselves, pass along an inspirational verse, or tell of a book or movie they liked.

The way form letters are printed can show as much care as the writing. One year I sent out a plain white, 8½" x 11" missive, but in pumpkin-hued envelopes, to arrive the day after Thanks-

giving. (That questionable color, on sale in July, turned out to be a real bargain in November!) A former roommate handwrote a lovely Christmas letter on predesigned stationery, then had it reproduced. Others have sketched holiday borders and accents; used a typewriter with a script print; photocopied pictures of their children with each family member contributing a paragraph; sealed flaps with holiday stickers. Why not dash off the original copy on ledger copy, a legal pad, or a recipe card—and give us a glimpse into your area of expertise?

Form letters need not be for Christmas only. How about red Valentine letters, Easter letters, 50th birthday letters? One Mother's Day I received belated Happy New Year wishes from an older friend, warning us not to expect much contact for a while because she was entering a Ph.D. program. It was great!

Whether reading hometown headlines on designer documents, or reports of something to shout about scrawled on a brown paper bag, those who hear from us know we've taken a fancy to form letters! ■

Sandy Brass Jenkins, Salt Lake City, Utah, is a free-lance author and experienced form-letter writer.

Form-letter Tips

ever met a Christmas form letter didn't like—until an acquaintance at a 4-page, single-spaced epistle, enumerating honors and accomplishments on a week-by-week basis! Here are some tips to help your form letters be well-received:

1 Include a Christmas greeting recognizing the holiness of the season.

2 Keep it short; there's really no need to tell *all*. Think "story," not "narrary."

3 A little bragging, and a little complaining go a long way. Avoid sending a form letter in a year that's been either perfect or perfectly terrible: a letter is likely to exceed accept-

able bragging/complaining quotients.

4 Humor helps.

5 Neatness, spelling and grammar do count. Have someone proofread your letter before making copies.

6 Photographs and artwork—photocopied on the page or tucked inside—add a special touch.

7 If you can swing it, a little personal note makes a big difference. Even something as short as:

*Merry Christmas!
Happy 1992!*

—Sue Edison-Swift

A Real Christmas

Karen Melang

Just once I wanted to have a quiet, wondrous, candle-filled Advent—an oasis from the blitz of baking, shopping, mailing, and entertaining that Christmas so readily become.

I bought a lovely Advent wreath and candles, searched diligently for the most appropriate devotional book for my young children, and had all the accoutrements perfectly arranged on the table the moment the Thanksgiving turkey was cleared.

These nightly Advent celebrations would serve several purposes, I hoped. They would be just the respite I needed to keep from being overwhelmed by Christmas. They would be peaceful and unhurried. They would offer quality family time, replacing baking cookies together, which, to be honest, was one of the worst experiences of my parenting career.

What a classic case of the best-laid plans going awry! The beautiful dream of my cheerful little family singing together in the soft light of the Advent wreath was promptly smashed by my real-life children: squabbling over who got to light the candles; who would pick the hymns (“He got to pick first last time!” “She got to pick three verses!”); who would blow out the candles (“No, she blew them out yesterday”); and, most important, who would get a clear view of the face of baby Jesus lying in the manger in the middle of the wreath.

My hopes and plans for an oasis from the craziness of Christmas were shattered by the reality of small children whose behavior was not significantly improved by the Advent candlelight, and for whom the baby Jesus had become an occasion to fight. What I had expected to have planned for did not materialize, and I was terribly disappointed. Each night in Advent brought more of



My hopes and plans for an oasis from the craziness of Christmas were shattered by the reality of small children.

me hassle and aggravation I had so wanted to avoid. One evening, frustrated and tired—not only by the devotion fiasco, but by too much baking, shopping and jamming whole cloves into oranges (I was making decorations then)—I bumped headlong into the real Christmas.

Like the light that blinded Paul on the Damascus road, it hit me: the real Christmas is not about having my house decorated like the ones I see in supermarket magazines. Nor is it baking dozens of ornately decorated cookies.

Real Christmas, I realized, does not exclude naughty little kids fighting over who gets to blow out Advent candles, or who blew wax on the table “on purpose.” Nor does it exclude frazzled parents, who sometimes think their real-life families should be like TV families, who at Christmas are always good and kind, warm and generous, but who, we sometimes forget, are actors.

It was for real people—harried, bickering, petty folk like us—that the God of all creation took on flesh and blood, lay in an animal feedbox, and died as a criminal. Emmanuel, God-with-us, came not only for angelic-looking people like those in the Christmas catalogs, all decked out in taffeta and velvet, but *for all people*, including feisty characters like us. And for innkeepers, too, who don’t give a second thought to poor and pregnant strangers. And for shepherds. And for . . . (you fill in the blank).

We continued having Advent devotions, accompanied by nightly discussions of which way the baby Jesus would face. Silently, each evening in the candlelight, I thanked God for some of my best gifts: the incredibly wonderful people around my table who, along with me, showed maddening signs of sinfulness—as well as wonderful signs of loving and caring.

I’ve stopped baking holiday cookies. And I haven’t been jamming cloves into oranges since. That Advent taught me that I didn’t need to “make Christmas happen.” I could look instead to the tiny figure in the middle of the wreath (faced in either direction), and let Christmas happen to me and to those around me.

Ren Melang, trained as a deaconess, is a communicator at the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. A regular “Give Us This Day” columnist, she is married and has two children who are now 13 and 16.



*Like the
light that
blinded
Paul on the
Damascus
road, it
hit me . . .*

A Midwife

Morris O. Wee

**I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
To see your life unfold.***

Birth is a sacred event, an intensely spiritual moment of grace. No doubt that is why the day of Jesus' birth has become such a high point in the life of the church. People know the power of birth, and we marvel at a God who would become so vulnerable and intimate with us.

Christians have understood God to be the source of life, connected with all parts of the birth process. God has conceived us (Numbers 11:12); God has knit us together in our mother's womb (Psalms 139:13); God has given us birth (Deuteronomy 32:18). The psalmist also speaks of God as a midwife at our birth: "it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast" (Psalm 22:9, New Revised Standard Version).

The births of my children have been the most awesome, profoundly spiritual experiences of my life. I tried to participate as fully as I could. But my experience was not like my wife's—as much as I wanted to, I could not do the physical labor. I identified more with the midwife.

The midwife's role is to be there, to wait, to encourage, to help. She does not make the birth happen; she aids in the delivery. And she is the first to

receive the child into its new world, the first to greet and touch the baby.

Our God, says the psalmist, is like a midwife. God greets us as we enter the world; God's touch is the first touch we know. God is present at that most intimate of times, to help our "borning cry."

As our Lord hung on the cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was quoting Psalm 22, the same psalm that contains the midwife image. Perhaps as Jesus uttered the psalmist's despairing cry, he also recalled the psalmist's memory of God's presence receiving him like a midwife at birth.

And so it is for us. At death, as at birth, we trust the presence of God who is with us in the most intimate of times, receiving us tenderly into new life. ■

Morris O. Wee lives with his wife, Kristine Carlson, and three sons in Northfield, Minnesota, where he is pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church.

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MISSION:

Action

Giving and Literacy

Colleen Last, a network literacy coordinator in Iowa, had an idea. She called to report that the Southeastern Iowa Synodical Women's Organization wanted to use part of its 1991 convention offering for literacy. Their plan was to contact libraries in communities where Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations are located and offer to donate books or other literacy materials helpful for new readers, or for the family literacy cause.

Reaction, Action

"Terrific idea," I thought.

"Do you have anything like a bookplate?" was Colleen's next question.

"No, but let's come up with something," I responded. An idea was bubbling: Why not combine the "Literacy Builds Bridges" artwork, which has been used with free literacy information, with a Women of the ELCA mailing label? But how could it be done?

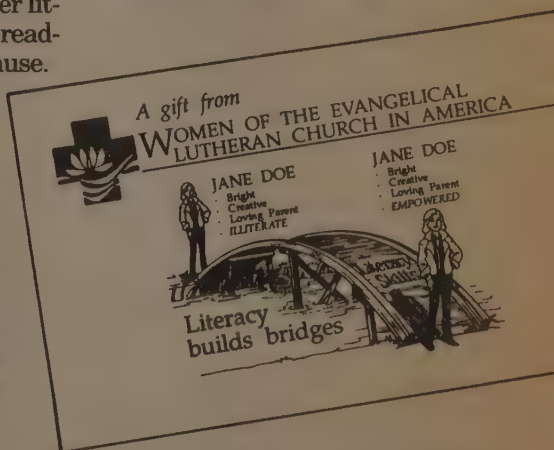
Next came a chat with Scott Holl, our resident Mission: Action desk-top magician. It didn't take him long, and *voila!* We had the bookplate you see on this page!

What a gift-filled experience! First, of course, is the gift of books to libraries from the Southeastern Iowa Synodical Women's Organization. And since no gift is ever a one-way

street, there is also the gift the givers received by making someone else happy.

In the process there surfaced another treasured gift—the sharing and building upon one another's thoughts and talents.

In this season of gifts, as we prepare to gift one another, may we think about both the gifts we wrap



and the more intangible ones that we can't. Both kinds are of value, and they are treasured when they come from the heart.

This Christmas—and throughout the year—think of what we can give by using our talents—whatever they are—in the cause of literacy.

Faith Fretheim
Director for Literacy

MISSION:

Growth

Matthew's Gospel

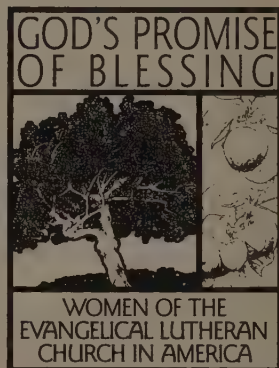
Beginning in January 1992, Lutheran Woman Today will feature *God's Promise of Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew*. This Bible study supports the 1992 programmatic theme, "Women: Blessing."

The gospel of Matthew explores God's promise of blessing to the people of God. Throughout Matthew, echoes of Israel's history and Old Testament prophecy are linked to Christ. The sequence of events in Jesus' life as recorded in Matthew encouraged early Christians to follow the paths of righteousness and blessing.

Some scholars believe Matthew may have been written during a period of transition in the early church. It may have served as a foundation for a specific community, one whose ties to Judaism were weakening as its ministry spread to Gentiles. Matthew wished to help this community with its internal problems, stressing the need to forgive one another.

References to Old Testament passages are key in Matthew. The gospel writer intentionally sought to show that Jesus fulfilled prophecies beyond the Jewish community, to a broader church.

The study is supported by a leader guide (2-9226; \$3.50) written for study leaders. The leader guide pro-



vides information on Matthew, the study format, the role of the leader, and support for each question found in the magazine's study. The Bible study resource book (2-9225; \$3.95) assists those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of biblical, theological, and contemporary issues raised in the study. The supplemental resources—the leader guide and resource book—are available in mid-November from Augsburg Fortress locations, or by calling 1-800-328-4648.

The study questions are available only in the 1992 issues of Lutheran Woman Today. For subscription information contact your congregational group coordinator, or call LWT Circulation at 1-800-328-4648, ext. 347.

*Crysta Wille
Mission: Growth*

MISSION:

Community

Take Advantage of Worship

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together* points out a number of essentials for Christian community. One of these is worship. The Christian community needs to be a worshipping community.

Of all the relationships that Mission: Community addresses—cross-cultural, global, ecumenical, family and other primary relationships—the relationship with God that is expressed through worship is of utmost importance. It undergirds and supports all the other relationships.

In these days before Christmas be sure to remember worship. Take advantage of every opportunity to let our relationship with God be nurtured, challenged and supported. Take advantage of every opportunity for worship so that you will remember the promises and presence of God. Take advantage of worship so that your journey of faith will be one of witness to God. Take advantage of worship so that you may be strengthened for God's mission in your community.

Here are some suggestions for our group's worship in 1992:

In January use the Women of the ELCA theme celebration, *Women: Blessing* (code 2-9276, \$1.25).

➤ **Take part in** Church Women United's World Day of Prayer (March 6—look for an article about it in the February 1992 Lutheran Woman Today); May Fellowship Day (May 1); and World Community Day (November 1).

➤ **Invite women to** gather or write worship, prayer, and devotional resources for use at each Women of the ELCA event.

➤ **Join other** Lutheran women in prayer each Monday at noon.

➤ **Celebrate** Women of the ELCA's fifth birthday in 1992 with special worship.

➤ **Regularly use the** Offerings Devotions for "Women: Blessing," available through the ELCA Distribution Service (code 68-9062), in circles and meetings.

➤ **Offer several** opportunities to gather Thankofferings in worship.

➤ **Start each meeting** with a devotion.

➤ **Include prayers for** Women of the ELCA ministries in your Sunday worship.

This month and throughout the coming year, let worship undergird and guide all you do.

Bonnie Belasic
Director for Communication and
Stewardship Interpretation



Noel

Fran Burnford

Sudden tears filled her eyes from the pain of banging her knee against an end table moved to an unaccustomed place. She welcomed the excuse of physical pain to allow suitable expression for the tears she had held back all day.

"The apartment is entirely too crowded with the Christmas tree taking up all this space," she thought to herself. "Why do they insist on coming here every year? Why don't we go to one of their homes some Christmas Eve?"

She thought of her four grown children and her grandchildren. They all had homes much more spacious than her modest apartment. Besides, she was anxious about the few gifts she was able to buy this year for the grandchildren. It seemed to her their parents bought them all they needed—and more.

And so in these closing hours of Advent she was filled with anxiety. What kind of Christmas Eve could she provide her family?

The sound of excited voices reached her from outside the door. A moment later the apartment was filled with her beloved family—infants, little children, teenagers, parents—all exchanging greetings and hugs.

The four-year-old ran straight for

the Nativity scene under the Christmas tree. She had almost discarded the manger figures this year—the were so well worn from just such little hands as these. "Here they are! Here they are! Here's Jesus and his mom and dad, and the animals and the shepherds and the Wise Men—and now we can have Christmas."

A six-year-old voice joined in. "Grandma, I love it when we come here for Christmas—Christmas here where we're all together."

She felt her doubts, anxieties and fears melt away as these little ones reminded her once again of the wonderful gift of Christmas. With a prayer of thanksgiving, she welcomed the Christ child into her home—and heart.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

Luke 2:10

Fran Burnford is associate executive director, Commission for Church and Society, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

◆ HONOR ROLL ◆

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1992 LWT Bible study discussed on Lutheran Vespers

Lutheran Vespers, an Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America radio
ministry, will air an interview with
Patricia Robertson on January 5,
1992. Robertson, Women of the
ELCA's associate executive director,
will discuss the Women of the ELCA
Bible study that will appear in 1992
issues of LWT: *God's Promise of
Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of
Matthew*.

For local-area broadcast times,
and for free audiocassettes and tran-
scripts of the January 5 program,
contact Lutheran Vespers at 8765 W.
Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631
(312-380-2967).

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“And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. . . .”

Revised Standard Version, Luke 2:8

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